

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00
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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
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AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
AMCONSUL FRNAKFURT

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EAIR, LE
SUBJECT: STATUS OF BEIRUT AIRPORT AND LEBANESE AIRLINES

1. SUMMARY: BEIRUT AIRPORT HAS MADE RAPID PROGRESS AND WITHIN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE SHOULD BE BACK TO A PRE-WAR LEVEL OF OPERATION. TRANS MEDITERRANEAN AIRLINES (MEA'S CARGO CARRIER) IS MOVING BACK TO BEIRUT, HAVING SUFFERED LITTLE DURING THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR. END SUMMARY.

2. AIRPORT RECOVERY. IN AN INTERVIEW DEC 14 WITH BEIRUT DAILY NEWSPAPER AL MUHARRIR, DIRGEN OF CIVIL AVIATION MADE THE FOLLOWING ON-THE-RECORD COMMENTS: HE EXPECTS THAT THE AIRPORT WILL RECUPERATE ITS FULL PRE-WAR CAPACITY WITHIN ONE MONTH. HE SAID THAT LIGHTING FOR NIGHT LANDINGS PRESENTED NO PARTICULAR PROBLEM, BUT THAT OPERATIONS AT NIGHT WERE PROVISIONALLY RESTRICTED TO CARGO FLIGHTS BECAUSE OF CERTAIN PROBLEMS OF EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE. HE SAID ALL AIRPORT MAINTENANCE TEAMS HAVE RESUMED WORK. HE ESTIMATED THE TOTAL COST OF RESTORATION OF THE AIRPORT FACILITIES AT ABOUT 15 MILLION LEBANESE POUNDS (OR ABOUT SIX MILLION US DOLS). AIRLINES ALREADY OPERATING REGULARLY TO BEIRUT INCLUDE MEA, AIR FRANCE, INTERFLUG, ALIA, KUWAIT AIRWAYS, LIBYA AIRWAYS, KLM, AND LOT. BEYDOUN SAID THAT DAILY AVERAGE TAKEOFFS AND DEPARTURES WAS 8-10 PLANES AS WELL AS APPROX FOUR TMA CARGO FLIGHTS. APPROX 1000 PASSENGERS WERE ARRIVING DAILY IN BEIRUT AND APPROX 500 DEPARTING. HE SAID THE AIRPORT RADAR WOULD START OPERATING "VERY SOON." FOR PREVIOUSLY PLANNED IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS DELAYED BY THE ONSET OF THE WAR, BEYDOUN SAID, SOME 60 MILLION POUNDS (OR 25 MILLION DOLS) WOULD BE NEEDED IN A FIRST PHASE.

3. TRANS MEDITERRANEAN AIRLINES. FROM MOUNIR ABU HAIDAR, PRESIDENT OF TMA, WE UNDERSTAND THAT TMA HAS MOVED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BACK ITS CENTRAL OPERATION TO BEIRUT, WITH SOME 700 PERSONNEL INCLUDING DEPENDENTS. DESPITE THE DISLOCATIONS OF THE WARR, TMA HAS CONTINUED ON A PROFITABLE BASIS, HAVING DISPERSED ITS OPERATIONS PRINCIPALLY TO AMMAN, NICOSIA, AND DUBAI.

4. MEA RETURNED ITS OPERATIONS TO BEIRUT IN NOVEMBER. ALTHOUGH THEY LOST MONEY DURING THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF, MEA SENIOR OFFICIAL INFORMED EMBOFF THAT LINE WAS IN "GOOD SHAPE" AS RESULT OF CHARTER WORK AND FINANCIAL RESERVES.

5. COMMENT: WITH THE RAPID EMERGENCY OF BEIRUT ONCE AGAIN AS THE AIR CAPITAL OF THE MIDDLE EAST, PRESSURE FOR THE RETURN OF AMERICAN CARRIERS CAN BE EXPECTED TO INCREASE. HOUGHTON

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